

CA 410: Persuasion in Context: Uncivil Discourse

Dr. Brett Lunceford

T/R: 3.30-4.45PM

UCOM 1219

Office: UCOM 1016

Office Hours: T/R 8.30-10.30AM, 2.30-3.30PM, and by appointment

Phone: 380.2822

Email: lunceford@usouthal.edu

Course Description

This course deals explicitly with rhetorical strategies that generally fall outside of the province of rational critical discourse. Some topics we will discuss include hate speech, violence, body rhetoric, and terrorism. Although such topics are often overlooked, they can function rhetorically, and it is important to see how. As Kenneth Burke said of Hitler's *Mein Kampf*, "Let us try also to discover what kind of 'medicine' this medicine-man has concocted, that we may know, with greater accuracy, exactly what to guard against."¹

This course has two primary goals:

- Provide students with an understanding of how uncivil discourse functions rhetorically
- Provide students with opportunities to recognize and apply rhetorical theory

These goals will be assessed through bi-weekly response papers and a final research paper.

I expect that each student will come to class prepared to discuss the readings for the day. According to the University of South Alabama's Academic Policies and Procedures, "Each hour of lecture usually requires two hours of outside preparation. Thus, a student carrying sixteen semester hours should be prepared to spend at least 48 hours in class and study per week."

Required Texts

Alinsky, Saul David. *Rules for Radicals: A Practical Primer for Realistic Radicals*. New York: Vintage Books, 1989.

Other readings will be available through the library's online course reserves.

Class Climate

This course deals explicitly with rhetorical strategies that generally fall outside of the province of rational critical discourse and the material that we will read may be offensive at times. However, it is nothing that you have not seen or heard before. Because we will deal with the dark side of rhetoric it is imperative that we maintain a climate of inquiry. The questions that we will grapple with have no easy answers and there will be points where you may disagree with someone else.

¹ Kenneth Burke, *The Philosophy of Literary Form: Studies in Symbolic Action*, 3rd ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973), 191.

This is appropriate and, to some degree, desirable. However, respect for others in the class is an essential component of this class. Consider this material akin to a rhetorical atomic bomb—all parties involved in examining it should treat it with appropriate care.

Attendance Policy

This is a senior level course, so I assume that by now you recognize the value of regular class attendance. This course relies heavily on in-class discussion. Excessive absences will negatively impact your participation grade in this course. If you are not present, you are not able to participate and it is impossible to make up the discussion. You get three absences free—no questions asked. However, after these absences, each absence will decrease your final grade by 5 points (half a letter grade), so use them wisely. In addition, there may be in-class activities, such as the paper discussion sessions, that are impossible to make up. If you are absent, please do not email me asking, “What did I miss?” You missed 75 minutes of discussion and perhaps a response paper assignment. Make friends with your classmates and get the notes from them and/or come to my office hours.

Academic Honesty

From the Student Academic Conduct Policies: “Any dishonesty related to academic work or records constitutes academic misconduct including, but not limited to, activities such as giving or receiving unauthorized aid in tests and examinations, improperly obtaining a copy of an examination, plagiarism, misrepresentation of information, or altering transcripts or university records. . . . Penalties may range from the loss of credit for a particular assignment to dismissal from the University” (*The Lowdown*, p. 249). In short, don’t do it. I don’t like to bust students for plagiarism or other forms of academic dishonesty but I will. It isn’t fair to others and it isn’t fair to yourself. If you have any questions on what constitutes plagiarism, see <http://www.southalabama.edu/univlib/sauer/plagiarismforstudents.html>.

Assignments

Response Papers: During the course, you will be assigned eight response papers, worth 5 points each. In them, you will be asked a question to relate to the readings of the previous two weeks. Late response papers will receive half credit at the most and will only be accepted by the next scheduled class. No papers will be accepted one week past the original due date. If you know that you will be absent when a response paper is due, have a classmate bring it to class or bring it to my office before the class period on which it is due. I will not accept papers by email.

Research Paper: Students will be required to examine an act, artifact, text, or phenomenon that falls within the bounds of uncivil discourse. The scope can be as broad or as narrow as you wish but they must contribute to our understanding of how uncivil discourse functions rhetorically. Papers should be 10-15 pages (including references) and may be formatted in any standard citation style (APA, MLA, Chicago, etc.). Halfway through the semester we will have two days to discuss research in progress. This is an opportunity to receive help and suggestions from your colleagues.

There will be no final exam in this course; the final paper will serve that purpose.

Grading Scale

There are a total of 100 points available in this course:

Reflection Papers: 40

Final Paper: 40

Participation: 20

A=90-100; B=80-89.99; C=70-79.99; D=60-69.99; F=below 60

Statement Regarding Students with Disabilities

In accordance with the Americans with Disabilities Act, students with bona fide disabilities will be afforded reasonable accommodation. The Office of Special Student Services will certify a disability and advise faculty members of reasonable accommodations.

If you will need special accommodations please talk to me as soon as possible.

A Note on my Teaching Philosophy

I believe that every student in my class has the ability to succeed in this course. My goal is to create a comfortable environment in which you can explore and improve your ability to think critically and skillfully present your ideas to an audience. I do not “give” grades; students earn grades—no one is entitled to get an “A” in a class unless they earn it. I cannot grade on effort—I must grade what you actually do. My job is to push students to do their best and to then exceed that standard. I recognize that this is futile unless I also provide the support and assistance that each student needs to excel. Therefore, I provide office hours and expect students to use them and am generally available through email. I assume that attaining a university degree is your first priority. If this is not the case, it is less likely that you will excel. Some of you are here because you want to get a better job. I believe that education should do much more than job training, but if you see it as job training, at least take it seriously. Recognize that you will probably be required to work 40 hours a week (or more) from 8am until 5pm. If you are chronically late, they fire you. If you do not do your work, they fire you. If you drop the ball, you probably will not get a raise, they may fire you, and in some cases legal action may be taken against you. Bottom line—you do your part to excel and I will be there to help you reach that goal.

Reading Schedule

Week 1

1/8 Course Introduction: Why Study Uncivil Discourse?

1/10 Alinsky: The Purpose

Week 2

1/15 Haiman, Franklyn S. "The Rhetoric of the Streets: Some Legal and Ethical Considerations." *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 53, no. 2 (1967): 99-114.

Alinsky: Of Means and Ends

1/17 Black, Edwin. "The Second Persona." *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 56, no. 2 (1970): 111-19.

Gregg, Richard B. "The Ego-Function of the Rhetoric of Protest." *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 4 (1971): 71-91.

Week 3

1/22 Kopecký, Petr, and Cas Mudde. "Rethinking Civil Society." *Democratization* 10, no. 3 (2003): 1-14.

Landy, Marc, and Wilson Carey McWilliams. "Civic Education in an Uncivil Culture." *Society* 22, no. 3 (1985): 52-55.

1/24 Gorringer, Hugo. "'Banal Violence'? The Everyday Underpinnings of Collective Violence." *Identities* 13, no. 2 (2006): 237-60.

Week 4

1/29 Gunderson, Robert G. "'The Calamity Howlers.'" *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 26, no. 3 (1940): 401-11.

Windt, Theodore Otto, Jr. "The Diatribe: Last Resort for Protest." *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 58 (1972): 1-14.

1/31 Alinsky: A Word About Words

Bosmajian, Haig A. "Freedom of Speech and the Heckler." *Western Speech* 36, no. 4 (1972): 218-32.

- Week 5 Education
- 2/5 **Mardi Gras Holiday – No Class**
- 2/7 Alinsky: The Education of an Organizer
- Week 6 Student Movements
- 2/12 Klumpp, James F. "Challenge of Radical Rhetoric: Radicalization at Columbia." *Western Speech* 37, no. 3 (1973): 146-56.
- Andrews, James R. "Confrontation at Columbia: A Case Study in Coercive Rhetoric." *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 55 (1969): 9-16.
- 2/14 Soule, Sarah A. "The Student Divestment Movement in the United States and Tactical Diffusion: The Shantytown Protest." *Social Forces* 75, no. 3 (1997): 855-82.
- Week 7 The Rhetoric of Violence
- 2/19 Doolittle, Robert J. "Riots as Symbolic: A Criticism and Approach." *Central States Speech Journal* 27 (1976): 310-17.
- Hosterman, Craig A. "The Rhetoric of Violence." *Communicator* 8, no. 1 (1978): 9-21.
- 2/21 DeLuca, Kevin Michael, and Jennifer Peeples. "From Public Sphere to Public Screen: Democracy, Activism, and the 'Violence' of Seattle." *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 19, no. 2 (2002): 125-51.
- Week 8 Paper Workshops
- 2/26 Discussion of Papers
- 2/28 Discussion of Papers
- Week 9 The Body as Symbolic Weapon
- 3/4 Turner, Terisa E., and Leigh S. Brownhill. "Why Women Are at War with Chevron: Nigerian Subsistence Struggles against the International Oil Industry." *Journal of Asian and African Studies* 39, no. 1-2 (2004): 63-93.
- 3/6 DeLuca, Kevin Michael. "Unruly Arguments: The Body Rhetoric of Earth First!, ACT UP, and Queer Nation." *Argumentation & Advocacy* 36, no. 1 (1999): 9-21.

- Week 10 Spring Break – No Class (Don't Get Too Uncivil)
- 3/11 **Spring Break – No Classes**
- 3/13 **Spring Break – No Classes**
- Week 11 The Rhetoric of Hate
- 3/18 Weatherby, Georgie Ann, and Brian Scoggins. "A Content Analysis of Persuasion Techniques Used on White Supremacist Websites." *Journal of Hate Studies* 4, no. 1 (2005): 9-31.
- 3/20 Bostdorff, Denise M. "The Internet Rhetoric of the Ku Klux Klan: A Case Study in Web Site Community Building Run Amok." *Communication Studies* 55, no. 2 (2004): 340-61.
- Week 12 FXXX 'Em if They Can't Take a Joke
- 3/25 Allen, Harold B. "Pejorative Terms for Midwest Farmers." *American Speech* 33, no. 4 (1958): 260-65.
- Video: Bugs Bunny Nips the Nips
- Video: Bugs Bunny War Bonds Commercial
- 3/27 Harold, Christine. "Pranking Rhetoric: 'Culture Jamming' as Media Activism." *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 21, no. 3 (2004): 189-211.
- Week 13 De/Re-Constructing Culture
- 4/1 Alinsky: Communication
- Bosmajian, Haig A. "Obscenity and Protest." *Today's Speech* 18 (1970): 9-14.
- 4/3 Alinsky: Tactics
- Week 14 Hacktivism
- 4/8 Denning, Dorothy. "Cyberwarriors: Activists and Terrorists Turn to Cyberspace." *Harvard International Review* 23, no. 2 (2001): 70-75.
- Wray, Stefan. "On Electrical Civil Disobedience." *Peace Review* 11, no. 1 (1999): 107-11.
- 4/10 Auty, Caroline. "Political Hacktivism: Tool of the Underdog or Scourge of Cyberspace?" *Aslib Proceedings* 56, no. 4 (2004): 212-21.

Week 15 Terrorism

4/15 McClenon, James. "Terrorism as Persuasion: Possibilities and Trends."
Sociological Focus 21, no. 1 (1988): 53-66.

4/17 Shaw, Anne E., and Alane C. Spinney. "Rhetoric, Repetition, and Violence: A
Case Study of Clinic Conflict in Milwaukee." *College Literature* 26, no. 1
(1999): 170-92.

Week 16

4/22 Alinsky: The Way Ahead

4/24 **Last Day of Class: Papers Due**

Other Suggested Readings

Speier, Hans. "Wit and Politics: An Essay on Laughter and Power." *American Journal of
Sociology* 103, no. 5 (1998): 1352-401.

Regarding Changes in Course Requirements

Since all classes do not progress at the same rate, the instructor may wish to modify the above requirements or their timing as circumstances dictate. For example, the instructor may wish to change the number and frequency of exams, or the number and sequence of assignments. However, the students must be given adequate notification. Moreover, there may be non-typical classes for which these requirements are not strictly applicable in each instance and may need modification. If such modification is needed, it must be in writing and conform to the spirit of this policy statement.